

DEVELOPING CHILDCARE SERVICES IN SCOTLAND: WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

Bronwen Cohen

Introduction

Childcare is used in this paper as a generic term to encompass services providing care, education and play for children below school age and those additional services which provide similarly for children outside school hours and during school holidays. It is perhaps indicative of the lack of serious attention given to policies in this area that the different forms and historical development of services have frequently been allowed to obscure their functional relationship. While all of these services are directly relevant to children and parents, and may in some cases be used interchangeably in meeting some of their needs, local and national policies have distinguished between them, attributing to none of them the levels of support required, but allocating to some a recognition of public responsibility in their development and funding whilst assigning the responsibility for others to parents, voluntary providers and, most recently, employers. In Scotland, as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, but unlike most other countries in the European Community, public responsibility for the development of services is restricted to the function of welfare and (now somewhat less clearly) education.

As maternal employment rates rise – in 1988 40% of Scottish mothers with a child of 0-9 years were in paid employment and a further 11% were seeking work⁽¹⁾ – and demand for services, in particular daycare, continues to grow, the key issue in childcare policy is that of responsibility. Can the development of daycare services, and perhaps education for under-fives, be left for parents to fund and to market forces or the voluntary sector to provide? Should public responsibility for the provision of services be restricted to those required by children in need? Whose responsibility is it to develop the services required to an increasing extent by Scotland's children and parents?

Public Responsibility: The Historical Context

Recognition of public responsibility for the provision of daycare services waxed and waned this century following to some degree the country's economic requirements. Public day nursery programmes – providing care for the children of working parents – were developed in Scotland, in common with the rest of the UK, during both the 1914-18 and 1939-45 wars and run down as wartime labour pressures diminished. Legislation at the end of the First World War empowering (but not requiring) local health authorities to provide day

nurseries brought little response and following the end of the Second World War negative attitudes towards maternal employment produced by post-war psychoanalytic theories contributed to a climate of opinion in which day nurseries could be closed down with only limited public protest. The emphasis which these theories placed on the dangers of separation of mothers and children allowed day nurseries to be seen as not only unnecessary but harmful except in response to particular parenting problems.

As a result both health authorities and, subsequently, social work departments on taking over responsibility in this area increasingly adopted a 'residual' welfare role, restricting their responsibilities as providers to the provision of services required by children and their families on health and welfare grounds. This has led to an increasing focus on parenting problems rather than the provision of daycare and a growing number of Scotland's family and children centres do not now provide daycare.

In parallel with this, public responsibilities for the regulation of services provided by private and voluntary organisations and individuals – where provided outside the parent's own home – have increased as, in the absence of public provision, parents have increasingly made use of private provision. In 1968 the then Labour Government tightened registration procedures and empowered local authorities to support childminders whilst indicating that it still saw a role for local authorities as direct service providers. However, in introducing these amendments to the Nurseries and Childminders Act the government minister responsible, Joan Lestor, commented:

"The ultimate object of any solution to the problems of the under-fives is obviously an urgent expansion of the day nursery service"⁽²⁾.

Public Responsibility: The Current Situation

From 1979 public responsibilities in the area of daycare have been more explicitly restricted to that of residual providers of welfare services together with a regulatory, monitoring, and support function for private and voluntary providers. Ministerial statements have emphasised parental responsibilities in providing care 'except where there are special needs' and the role of private and voluntary resources in the provision of these services. In 1985 the junior DHSS minister John Patten commented in response to a parliamentary question:

"Daycare will continue to be primarily a matter of private arrangement between parents and private and voluntary resources except where there are special needs, but we should like to see local authorities continuing to develop supporting supervisory and information roles alongside their registration function"⁽³⁾.

Three years later his successor Edwina Currie, on being asked to

comment on the publication of the European Childcare Network reports, responded:

"These reports deal with childcare largely from the point of view of working parents. Our view is that it is for parents that go out to work to decide how best to care for their children. If they want or need help in this they should make the appropriate arrangements and meet the costs".⁽⁴⁾

The Children Act 1989 (of which sections on changes in relation to registration of childminding and daycare cover Scotland as well as England and Wales) confirms the policy of limiting local authorities responsibilities in the provision of services to children described as 'in need'.

English local authorities are required to provide appropriate daycare for children in need aged under five and appropriate care and supervised activities outside school hours and during school holidays for school-age children in need. A child in need is defined as where:

- (a) he (sic) is unlikely to achieve or maintain or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services, or
- (b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired without the provision for him of such services, or
- (c) he is disabled.⁽⁵⁾

In Scotland local authorities remain empowered, but are not required, to provide such services as are necessary to promote the welfare of children.

Awareness of the downturn in the labour supply and skill shortages – highlighting the inefficient use of female labour – and the increasing acknowledgement of the impact of lack of services on equality of opportunity for women, have not led to a re-examination of public responsibility in this area but to an emphasis on employers' responsibility and examinations of measures to stimulate the development of private and voluntary daycare services. John Patten, who moved from the DHSS to the Home Office where his responsibilities include equal opportunities, told a Childcare Conference in 1990 "employers will have to cough up"; and in the same year the government stopped taxing employees on their employers' subsidies to workplace nurseries, a measure which has assisted parents with access to this form of provision but is of only limited significance given the very small number of such nurseries and the limited encouragement through the tax system to increase their provision. A survey carried out by the Industrial Relations *Review and Report* in 1989 found that only 3% of organisations in the survey provided childcare facilities (and only one in five had agreements which improve

minimum statutory requirements for maternity provision)⁽⁶⁾.

A report published by the Adam Smith Institute saw childcare as “a leading growth industry” and warned that “public sector provision tends to crowd out any private supply”. It concluded that the private market should be assisted “to enable it to expand and develop the mass market service which will soon be required”.⁽⁷⁾

One result of the withholding of recognition of public responsibility for the provision of services providing care has been to obscure the role which educational services could more effectively play in meeting parental requirements of care together with their acknowledged educational function.

Nursery education itself has struggled for recognition as a service available for all children with some local authorities offering no provision at all. The discovery (following a case taken by a parent) that the 1944 Education Act might after all require education authorities to provide nursery education led to its rapid amendment in 1980. In the United Kingdom as a whole only a quarter of three and four year olds are in nursery education, largely part-time, and a further 20% are in infants classes in primary schools. In Scotland levels of provision for nursery education are in general much higher, covering 32% of three and four year olds, but this is mostly part-time and is considerably less extensive than in countries such as France and Belgium where over 95% of 3 and 4 year olds are in nursery education generally full-time⁽⁸⁾.

Extended hours schemes – allowing children to arrive earlier and stay later than the normal hours – are rare in both nursery and primary schools and out of school provision both in term time and holidays is also very limited. A circular issued in England in October 1989 indicated that the government is beginning to show interest in the possible use of schools themselves for the provision of out-of-hours childcare. In a letter to the local education authorities the Department of Education and Science expressed the hope that “governing bodies may wish to encourage wider use of their premises during non-school time both for the additional income which such use can bring to the school and in recognition of the school role in the community”. However, LEA governing bodies were asked to “bear in mind that under local management of schools the school’s budget may not subsidise any non-school use of its premises. Any use of school premises for childcare facilities must therefore be on a full cost recovery bases”.⁽⁹⁾ A draft circular issued by the Scottish Office the following year reflects the different situation in Scotland in relation to school management and governing bodies. In Scotland the responsibility of School Boards for controlling the use of school premises is limited by the Education Authority’s powers to fix charges, as well as the requirement to encourage the use of school premises by members of the community in which the school is situated. However, the Scottish circular shares the optimistic approach of the English circular that such use should “normally be self-financing” or that employers would agree to assist “as they

increasingly come to see economic and practical advantages of providing childcare facilities for their employees”⁽¹⁰⁾. In the 1990’s employers seem set to become the latest recipient of government hopes for avoiding or minimising its own contribution to the development of childcare services.

Childcare Services in Scotland

Current childcare provision in Scotland reflects the narrow definition of public responsibility in the provision of services in particular in meeting parental requirements of care (see Table 1). Scotland has far fewer services for parents in paid employment or education than England and far fewer still than in many European countries. In 1988 there were places in Scottish local authority day nurseries for 1.6% of children under five compared with 1% in England, but many of these day nurseries (as already noted) now take the form of family centres and are not usually available for parents in paid employment or education. The number of places in private and voluntary registered day nurseries, which are in general used by working parents is increasing but although (according to Scottish Office estimates) places in these increased by nearly a third between 1985 and 1988 there are still only places for 0.4% of children under five compared with 1.2% in England. Childminding provides more daycare places. In 1988 childminding provided places for 3.6% of Scotland’s under fives, having increased by 57% between 1985 and 1988. The number of places are far fewer than in England and Northern Ireland and childminding in the UK, unlike childminding in such countries as Denmark and France, receives very little public support.

Scotland has a higher level of provision for nursery education than England. 32% of Scotland’s three and four year olds are in nursery education compared with 24% in England. In England a further 20% of three and four year olds are in primary schools often without appropriate staff or curriculum. Scotland’s later age of entry to primary school with children not generally accepted until the term of or the term after their fifth birthday avoids this problem but means that fewer children have access to educational services as a whole. Nursery education in both Scotland and England is predominantly (and increasingly) part-time. Playgroup provision is high in Scotland – there are places for 37% of three and four year olds. However, playgroups like childminders receive very little public funding and average attendance is only two or three sessions per week.⁽¹¹⁾

Care schemes for school-age children are extremely sparse. Survey evidence suggests that there are only fifty schemes for the whole of Scotland providing care for 0.4% of children in term-time and 0.5% in the summer holiday. A number of authorities have no schemes and 42 of the 50 schemes are in Strathclyde.

The publicly funded element within Scotland and UK childcare provision is limited in comparison with most other countries in the European

TABLE 1
CHILDCARE SERVICES IN SCOTLAND AND UK 1985 and 1988

	1985		1988	
	Scotland	UK	Scotland	UK
Day Nurseries				
LA day nursery places	3,830	32,964	5,031	34,225
Places per 1,000 pop. aged 0-4	11.8	9.1	15.6	9.1
Private and voluntary places	250	27,535	1,280 ^(a)	40,378
Places per 1,000 pop. aged 0-4	0.8	7.6	3.9	10.8
Total day nursery places	4,080	60,497	6,281	74,603
Total places per 1,000 pop. aged 0-4	12.6	16.7	19.5	19.9
Childminding				
Registered places	7,470	144,908	11,740	189,054
Places per 1,000 pop. aged 0-4	23.0	40.1	36.34	50.44
SEA Nursery Education				
Full-time children	2,910	58,197	3,052	56,696
Part-time children	34,960	280,344	37,803	302,614
Total	37,870	338,541	40,855	359,316
Nursery pupils as % of pop. aged 3 & 4	28	23	32	25
SEA Primary Schools				
Pupils under five	10,486	295,202	9,456	297,082
Pupils as % of pop aged 3 & 4	7.9	20.3	7.5	20.3
Special Schools				
Pupils under five	—	6,000	340	6,000
Pupils as % of pop aged 0-4	—	0.2	0.1	0.2
Independent Schools				
Pupils under five	—	35,000	1,315	40,000
Pupils as % of pop. aged 0-4	—	1.0	0.4	1.1
Playgroups				
No: of places	43,860	468,945	46,838	490,515
Places as % of pop. aged 3 & 4	32.8	32.2	37.1	33.5

(a) Scottish Office estimate

Source: B. Cohen, *Caring for Children*, The 1990 Report for the European Commissions Childcare Network, Family Policy Studies Centre 1990. Forthcoming.

Community.⁽¹²⁾ Scotland has publicly funded services for less than 1% of children under three, approximately a third of three and four year olds and less than 1% of school age children out of school hours.

By contrast Denmark in 1985 had publicly funded places for 44% of children under three, for 87% of three to six year olds and 20% of school age children: and its public day nursery provision and provision for school-age children are now both increasing quite rapidly. In the area of nursery education although some local authorities such as Fife Regional Council and Lothian are now providing very high levels of coverage for four year olds this is predominantly on a part-time basis and compares with levels of provision in France and Belgium for both three and four year olds of over 95%, in general on a full-time basis⁽¹³⁾.

Demand for Provision

These low levels of provision do not reflect an absence of demand in particular for daycare for both pre and school age children. A survey carried out in Strathclyde in 1988 (see Table 2) found that of those mothers of under-fives not working, under a quarter said they would choose to be at home if adequate childcare was available. A substantial majority said they would choose to work, 47% of them on a part-time basis 16% full-time and a further 13% would undertake further education.

TABLE 2

Attitudes of Non-Working Mothers of Children aged 0-4 Strathclyde 1988

Mothers would choose, if suitable childcare available	ALL	APT	NON APT	RURAL
To be at home	24	24	25	21
Further Education	13	13	14	10
Work part-time	47	46	42	56
Work full-time	16	18	16	13

Source: G Scott *Families and Under fives in Strathclyde*, Strathclyde Regional Council, 1989.

The Strathclyde survey found that demand in rural areas was higher than in urban areas reflecting changing attitudes towards employment in many rural areas in the European Community. A major European research programme on structural change and household pluriactivity being undertaken by the Arkleton Trust Research Limited has found a marked increase in female participation rates in many although not all rural areas. In the rural area studied in Scotland, in Grampian, 62%, of spouses of working age under 60 were economically actively on a regular basis and 71% if seasonal activity was included⁽¹⁴⁾. While demand is highest in rural areas the Strathclyde survey found that levels of provision were lower for all services in rural areas.

Within areas of urban deprivation the shift within local authority day nursery provision away from the provision of day care and the development and funding of new provision run by local authorities and/or voluntary organisations as centres working primarily with families has paralleled high levels of unemployment and a concern to some degree arising from this with the impact of social and economic disadvantage on the quality of parenting. One apparently unforeseen consequence has been that, despite a higher level of publicly funded provision in some of these areas, affordable daycare is scarce. In Tayside, a recent survey of parents and their perceptions of family centres found that the parents still overwhelmingly wanted daycare for pre-school and school-age children. The provision of daycare for pre-school children was the top priority for 86% of those surveyed and school-age childcare for 80%⁽¹⁵⁾.

Addressing Family Poverty

In the Tayside survey, the daycare was wanted by parents whether or not they were in paid employment or in education and training. The majority of parents (64%) saw daycare as "a valuable experience in its own right, enhancing the child's development." However, the provision of daycare is also one way of addressing high levels of family poverty. One factor contributing to the very high poverty levels amongst families with under fives in disadvantaged areas is the low proportion of mothers in paid employment. The Strathclyde Family Survey found that in areas of urban deprivation, 45% of families were living on incomes of less than £80.00 per week. This reflects not only the high proportion of lone parent households – 27% compared with 7% in other urban areas – but also the lower rates of employment amongst mothers in general in these areas – 20% compared with 33% in other urban areas⁽¹⁶⁾.

There is no single answer to these disturbing levels of family poverty but rather a need for a range of policies which include providing all parents with better financial support to compensate for lower levels of income associated with childbearing and childrearing, and enabling them, through improved leave provision, to maintain contact with the labour market. However, the evidence strongly suggests that access to daycare must form part of the answer in facilitating and improving employment possibilities for mothers of under-fives and school-age children, and in providing access to education and training which not only enables women to improve their own financial position, but can, through enlarging the pool of skilled labour, assist in the economic regeneration of disadvantaged areas.

Meeting the need and demand for daycare services in disadvantaged areas necessarily requires public involvement in some form in its provision, to ensure its availability, quality and affordability. Leaving the provision of daycare for parents to fund and the market to provide disadvantages the already disadvantaged. Publicly provided day nursery provision in the UK is now (for the first time in the post-war period) less significant than private and

voluntary provision and, as a result of the withdrawal of a significant number of day nurseries from the provision of daycare, this shift is undoubtedly more significant than is revealed by the statistics. The policy of leaving it to the market has not proved markedly successful in increasing the level of provision in the UK as a whole. In 1988 there was still only day nursery provision for 2% of the UK under-fives and provision with childminders for 5%. But private provision has increased more rapidly in the more advantaged areas. Private and voluntary day nursery provision in England rose from 8.7 places per 1,000 children in 1985 to 12 places per 1,000 in 1988. Although places in Scotland's private and voluntary nurseries are increasing, they still only provided in 1988 for 4 places per 1,000 children⁽¹⁷⁾. Although the statistics are not collated in a way which provides a detailed comparison between districts, the available statistics and local survey evidence show that in general the more advantaged urban areas have more private and voluntary provision than those more economically disadvantaged or where as, in rural areas, the difficulties in delivering services are substantially greater.

Local Authority Developments

Overcoming the difficulties inherent in the development of provision in some areas and ensuring that all parents have access to provision requires an acknowledgement of public interest and responsibility in its development. At a local government level a growing number of local authorities in Scotland is now reviewing their childcare policies and appear to be interested in developing a wider role for themselves in this area. One aspect of this involves the re-examination of the relationship between different areas of provision, and the transfer of all services for under-fives to the Education Department in one authority – Strathclyde – reflects a more integrated approach in general to the management of services.

Increasing recognition of the economic dimension of childcare services and their impact on the local labour market has led a number of authorities to develop partnership schemes with employers and other interested parties including those organisations involved in education and training. The first day nursery to open under such a scheme was in Fife Region, where the Regional Council's Partnership in Childcare scheme currently involves the development of five partnership day nurseries (one of which is being developed by a voluntary organisation) and where the Education Department is also considering a pilot project for the provision of after-school care within its schools.

The most extensive partnership scheme is in Glasgow, where a project initiated by Glasgow Development Agency, in conjunction with Strathclyde Regional Council and the European Childcare Network, envisaged the development of 10 partnership nurseries. The scheme, as initially conceived,⁽¹⁸⁾ involves a multi-functional partnership model, enabling employers, colleges and training schemes to meet their own needs in

conjunction with others with similar needs, whilst allowing the authority to fulfil its responsibilities both as an employee and in respect of children in need, within provision supported by employers and voluntary funding, but developed in a form which reflects the authority's own economic and social strategies for the area. At the time of writing, the decision on the project is still not known.

Partnership schemes offer local authorities currently constrained from major policy initiatives an opportunity to secure some development in provision in a form they are able to influence to a greater or lesser extent according to the model used and which has a particular value in enabling them to address the problems associated with providing for children in need in a more integrated setting. It remains to be seen how significant such schemes will be in meeting the high and increasing levels of demand without earmarked public funding. They are, however, encouraging authorities to re-examine their own resources. The Glasgow project, for example, envisaged the use of school premises and, whilst the government circular on the use of school premises for out-of-school childcare schemes is unlikely, in the absence of funding, to lead to the development of any significant number of schemes it has encouraged both schools and authorities to consider their provision as a whole, rather than viewing it in the compartmentalised way in which it has, largely through historical accident, developed.

Conclusion

The very low levels of childcare services in Scotland relative to many other countries in the European Community reflect a reluctance in this country to acknowledge public responsibility for services other than those which rescue children, or at times of national emergency, rescue the country, with the rather lukewarm exception made of a limited amount of nursery education. The lack of acknowledgement of public responsibility in ensuring the availability of services which meet the needs of parents for affordable high quality care and the social and developmental requirements of children has led to a frequently underfunded structure, depriving both children and women of equality of opportunity and impacting both quantitatively and qualitatively on the Scottish labour market.

In addressing these problems, Scotland has much to learn from other European countries and perhaps in particular from Denmark, a country like Scotland with some 5,000,000 inhabitants. In Denmark a law of 1964 provided the basis for the development of its impressive daycare services. The law established that the provision of public daycare should not be seen as a residual function but rather based on a universal principle, offering all children a place in public daycare. This provided in 1985 for 60% of all children under school age and its services, which are still expanding, address both the care needs of parents together with the developmental requirements of children themselves. Denmark, in common with other Scandinavian countries and the majority of

countries within the European Community, also offers both parents parental leave.

In this country which has a strong and developing 'third sector' in service provision, not all would argue that the services themselves should be provided publicly. It is however essential that we come to terms with childcare and accept public responsibility in the development and funding of services which recognise the needs of all children and their parents. If Scottish children and their parents are to have access to the provision they need on a basis which does not discriminate in terms of income or employment, we have to move from viewing the provision of daycare as a residual measure to adopting a universalistic and integrated approach to the development of all services.

Bronwen Cohen, Director, Scottish Child and Family Alliance, and UK Member of the European Commission Childcare Network.

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